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WILLIAM PENN'S

HOLY EXPERIMENT

IN

CIVIL GOVERNMENT

BENJAMIN F. TRUEBLOOD, LL.D.

Address delivered in Philadelphia, in 1894, at the time of the placing of the statue of William Penn on the Tower of the Municipal Building.

ELEVENTH THOUSAND

BOSTON
THE AMERICAN PEACE SOCIETY
1906

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WILLIAM PENN'S HOLY EXPERIMENT IN CIVIL GOVERNMENT.

The first knowledge that I ever had of the noble statue which now crowns your great municipal building came to me in a rather curious way. Years ago when the work of constructing the building was not more than half completed I chanced to be in the city. Walking one day up Market street toward the Broad-street station, I enquired of a gentleman who was with me what the cost of the edifice was likely to be when completed. He gave me approximately the cost up to that time, and said that nobody could guess what the expense of the future work would be. He then added, with a significant smile, that it was proposed to cover up the stock-jobbery connected with its erection by placing a statue of William Penn in his broadbrim on the top of it.

This was my introduction to the statue in connection with the placing of which I have been invited to say a few words about William Penn's experiment in Christian statesmanship. I am sure, after the little avalanche of municipal righteousness which has recently descended upon several of our cities, that you will agree with me when I say that the lifting of this statue of the great Quaker to the summit of your city hall means something more

than the mere *covering up* of some stock-jobbery, more or less, which may have been connected with its erection. May we not take it as a prophecy of the entire banishment from your city life of all municipal crookedness and pollution, and of the enthronement in our common country, for you and for us all, of that principle of brother-love,—divine, all comprehensive, practical,—out of which all Penn's work grew. This principle he has enshrined in the name which every citizen of this great city speaks and hears spoken every day of his life. Philadelphia, brother-love! That is the message of the silent lips of the founder to the great Commonwealth to-day. That is the thing which human society, after its long sorrowful centuries of bitter hate and endless bloodshed, is slowly learning to recognize as "the greatest thing in the world"; the real secret of all that is worthy and enduring in its progress.

The story of William Penn, in its marvellous uniqueness and its unmistakable participation in the supernatural, has always read to me much like a myth out of the olden time. Not that there is anything shadowy or unreal about it, for in the entire annals of the race no bit of history is more authentic and clear. So many of the original documents are preserved in the archives of your own Historical Society and elsewhere that the man stands before us worshipping, loving, preaching, writing, creating charters, making treaties, governing, settling difficulties, allaying disorders, defending himself against injustice and wrong, giving away his life and

fortune, and breaking down under abuse and ingratitude, in as lifelike a way as if he were still the governor of the Commonwealth which he founded on this spot 212 years ago. Not only is his history incomparably clear, but it is also clearly unlike any other piece of human history. In its grasp of the principles of liberty, equality and brotherhood, and of the secret of their successful establishment among men, and particularly in its heroic application of these principles and of this secret in the constitution and government of a Commonwealth, it stands apart an absolutely unique chapter in the history of men and of States. It was a "holy experiment" because it was founded in love, built up on the principles which love dictates and carried forward in the faith which is inspired and sustained by love.

For the sake of clearness in the historic picture, let us consider, in order, the purpose of the experiment, the conditions under which it was tried, the success which attended it, and the influence which it has exerted.

Briefly stated, William Penn's purpose in buying of the king lands here in America and in preparing a charter for the government of the colony which he was proposing to plant was that he might establish a Christian State, based from the start on Christian principle, created and directed in the spirit of Christian love, a State in which the governing and the governed might realize together the blessings of the brotherhood taught by Jesus Christ. He reasoned that if Christianity is true, if the principles of

Christ's mountain instruction are obligatory for the individual, they must be no less so for the State. He had verified these principles in his own experience; he would therefore seize the opportunity which the providence of God had given him, to test their practicability, of which he had not the slightest doubt, in the wider circle of the State.

In order to understand fully the real nature of his purpose, we must go to its root and remember that it was founded in the Christian doctrine of love. He did not lead forth a colony that he and they might simply escape the tyrannies of the old world and struggle together for freedom, for independence and self-government in the new. He led it forth that he might give it the love which Christ had created in his own soul, and as the head of a State exemplify those forms of benevolence and practical righteousness which spring from this great life-root. The purpose had in it freedom, independence, equality of privilege and self-government of the highest order, but these were to be the fruit of the tree rather than the tree itself. Everywhere love, thinking and planning and living for others, was to be the creating and controlling motive, and whatever could not be done in love was not to be done at all. Whoever misses this point of view can never understand the nature of the "holy experiment" nor comprehend the mutual relation of its different parts. Many historians have lauded William Penn's services to the cause of civil and religious liberty, but have failed to grasp this secret of the experiment, and hence have con-

sidered his abandonment of the sword and his almost complete dependence on the moral power of truth and of Christian kindness and self-giving as a well-meant but unfortunate bit of religious sentimentalism and as the fatal weakness of the whole undertaking. On the contrary, I venture to say that this pacific policy was not only an essential part of the scheme but its distinguishing feature and glory. Without it the experiment would have been vitiated and would have differed in no essential respect from other experiments in free government which were being made on these shores. In fact, it would have been impossible. There would have been no one to make it. So that whatever praise is due to the experiment is due to it because it was a peace-experiment dictated by the love which works no ill to one's neighbor. Lands had been bought of the natives in several other parts of the colonies. Carver had made a treaty with Massasoit at Plymouth, which had been faithfully kept for fifty years, but it was a defensive war alliance, the native warriors in their accoutrements being present on the one side and Miles Standish with his standing army of six men in line on the other. Roger Williams and Lord Baltimore had introduced religious toleration into the colonies of Rhode Island and Maryland, as had Locke and Shaftesbury in the Carolinas. It is true that Penn went further in the principles of pure democracy than was the case in the other colonies, but he did this for the same reason that led him to banish the sword, and there were not a few occasions

in the early history of the colony when the absence of the sword proved to be the greatest safe-guard of the liberties of the infant democracy. No — the peace plank in his platform of principles was cut from the same tree as all the rest. The heart that loved his fellowmen so fully that it was impossible for him even to *wear* the sword against them was the only heart in England at that time that knew the outmost meaning of human rights, human liberties and human equalities. A Commonwealth of love, justice, liberty, equal rights and peace — that was what this Christian statesman proposed to found.

What were the conditions under which this experiment in Christian statesmanship had to be made? In order to understand the difficulty and to appreciate the heroism of the task and to measure rightly the success of the undertaking, it must be remembered that the characteristics of the time, on both sides of the Atlantic, were, both in principle and in practice, totally contrary to what William Penn proposed to do. It was an age of war and selfishness and cruelty; an age of suspicion and treason and judicial murder; an age of greed and envy and betrayal; of persecution and imprisonment and torture, when a man's life was scarcely worth the hat which he wore on his head. Intolerance was the very soul of that epoch. Cromwell and his ironsides were gone, after having swept all England with the sword, in the name of liberty. The polluted and frivolous and persecuting Charles II. was still on the throne when Penn's experiment began in 1682.

Then came James II., smooth of tongue but cruel of heart, whose reign, in spite of the relief which he gave to the Friends, was an intolerable civil and religious despotism, during which the diabolical Chief Justice Jeffreys went round his Bloody Circuit and returned from it to receive the Great Seal and to boast that he had hanged more persons for high treason than all the judges of England since William the Conqueror. The struggle for liberty and toleration which was still in its infancy, which was rendered desperate by the atrocious cruelties committed by James' minions and which finally brought on the revolution which placed William III. on the throne, everywhere armed itself with the sword and knew little of any other means of attaining its end.

William Penn was by birth a son of this time. Its instincts were in his blood. He was born and reared a soldier. His ancestry for two generations had been men of war. But for the miracle of grace which converted him to pure New Testament Christianity and subdued the fighting nature within him, he would most probably have become the admiral of an English fleet or the commander of an army and have stained his hands with blood in defence of the liberty and toleration of that particular party into which the accident of birth had cast him. He had, therefore, as the divinely appointed prophet and leader of a new age to break not only with his time but also with his own flesh and blood. The difficulties of his undertaking were hightened by the fact that outside of

his own religious connection he had few sympathizers. There was in all England scarcely any man except Algernon Sidney who entered intelligently into his broad conception of civil liberty, and Sidney was a man of war spirit. If Penn, then, was driven by the religious and political intolerance and narrowness of his time and by the impulses of a great freedom and of a great love within him to seek a home for liberty in the new world, what sympathy and support could he expect from his mother country where intolerance reigned and where the clash of arms was always heard, if, that is, he should attempt to set up and maintain his free commonwealth without an appeal to the sword? It is scarcely to be wondered at that England laughed merrily at the supposed stupidity of her Quaker son. King Charles, if the traditional interview between him and Penn is to be trusted, doubtless expressed the general feeling of astonishment at Penn's rashness, when he said, "I have no idea of any security against those cannibals but in a regiment of good soldiers with their muskets and bayonets." Penn must have known, then, not only that this distrust of his method would follow him, but also that the militarism of western Europe would sooner or later throw its baleful influence across the Atlantic to the banks of the Delaware around and into the very colony which he was planting.

In fact, the greedy, intolerant, narrow and fighting spirit of the old world was already in the new, so that the conditions existing in 1682 on this side of the Atlantic

were not much more encouraging for the experiment than those on the other. Religious intolerance from which the Pilgrims had fled and which Penn wished to make forever impossible in his colony, had already appeared and was destined to run a course of obstinate cruelty "not unworthy the best days of the Star Chamber and the Court of Inquisition." To what extent religious persecution had gone in the Virginia colonies and especially in New England every true American would be only too glad to forget, and the rope by which some of his own fellow religionists had hung had scarcely been taken down when Penn began to plan for his experiment. Political tyranny was likewise trying to throttle the nascent liberties of the colonies, and that conflict was already under way which finally resulted in the revocation of most of the colonial charters and in the placing of most of the new Commonwealths directly under the control of the Crown. There was a third and even greater danger to the undertaking as the sequel proved. That contest for the mastery of North America which reached its culmination in the war between France and England in 1755--59 was already beginning to throw its bloody shadow over the country. It was to the pressure of this contest that Pennsylvania finally yielded and abandoned the peace policy.

Then, again, the Indians had been rendered suspicious and vindictive in nearly all parts of the colonies by the treatment which they had met with at the hands of the whites. The fact that they were a race of savages, wholly

unacquainted with the elementary principles of Christianity, following as the law of their life their animal instincts, engaged in almost incessant inter-tribal wars and brutalized into blood-thirsty scalpers, would in itself have made the experiment seem difficult enough to an ordinary man. But colonization had been going on for sixty years, and during all this period the settlers had not only met the Indians on the plane of force but had often wrested their lands from them by violence or trickery and treated them as if they had no rights to the soil, or even no rights at all.

From the days of Carver and Miles Standish on, the whites in New England had met the Red Men on the plane of force.[1] The tension between the two races became greater and greater until in 1675, only seven years before Penn arrived, King Philip's war had broken out and for a whole year massacre, burning and desolation reigned everywhere. The wild war whoop was heard by probably every family in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Connecticut and six hundred white men, the pick and pride of the country, fell in battle. The Red Men were swept out of New England, but only to spread disaffection and the spirit of revenge to the West and South. The disaffection of the natives in the other parts of the colonies was equally great, and from the same causes. In Virginia the first settlers had built a fort and placed sentinels on guard. One has only to read the romantic but inhuman and vengeful life of Captain John

Smith to understand why there was always trouble with the Indians on the borders of Maryland and Virginia and three general Indian wars and massacres before these colonies were fifty years old. In the settlements of New York and vicinity the same line of policy had been followed in the treatment of the Indians with the same sad and desolating results. In the Carolinas the treatment of the natives was even more degrading, and they were fast disappearing through the influence of drink and the fraudulent and forcible occupation of their hunting grounds, while those who still remained were jealous and revengeful.

At the time when Penn came, therefore, he found, not the original natives of the forests warlike and fierce but at the same time open-minded and trustful, but a race filled with distrust and hatred of the whites and cherishing a sullen, cunning, unrelenting spirit of vengeance. It is not strange that King Charles thought they might have Penn in their war-kettle in two hours after his arrival. Penn himself did not treat as a trivial thing the possible dangers awaiting him and his colonists from a race accustomed to the tomahawk, the scalping knife and the war-kettle, and whose dislike for the whites was so deep-seated and apparently implacable.

What hope, then, was there that the new colony in which civil and religious liberty and equality were carried to the extreme of universal suffrage and universal toleration, with not a soldier to defend its rights, could

live a year under such conditions as have just been shown to exist on both sides of the Atlantic? From the ordinary human standpoint, absolutely none. But Penn's was neither the ordinary nor the human standpoint, as generally conceived. But he had already tried the strength of his new faith against English Kings and English mobs, against perverted judges and soulless officers, in English prisons and the Tower, and whatever might be the outcome of this larger effort to help his fellowmen he would brave every difficulty and do his duty.

Of the success of the experiment it is easy and at the same time somewhat difficult to speak, so different are the standards by which men judge of success. Fortunately, in the case before us, success followed so many different lines that no one has ever dared to say that the experiment was a failure.

Not the least remarkable of its successes was the fact that Penn himself was true to his own ideal of Christian statesmanship till the end of his life — thirty-six years after he first came to the new world. After the most critical sifting of his history, through which the strictures of Macaulay and Bishop Burnet and Dr. Franklin have been shown to be utterly unfair and ungracious, not a deed, not a line, scarcely a word of his can be found with which to reproach him for faltering, much less for worldliness or duplicity. His unselfish devotion to the good of mankind grew greater to the last. He loved his Commonwealth, and gave himself for it. He might have built

up a colossal fortune through his proprietary rights, the granting of monopolies and restrictions on trade. But he resisted all the seductions of wealth, that others might be free and happy and prosperous. He was true to his promise that the colony should be free and self-governing. His powers as governor he allowed to be gradually restricted, that neither he nor any of his successors might ever be able to work mischief. The representatives sent up by the universal suffrage of the people made the laws, and when the charter was found to be inadequate to the growing needs of the community, he freely gave them a new or modified one. It is a waste of time to stop to say that he was loyal to the principle of religious toleration. No man of any nation or of any religious creed was allowed to be persecuted for his faith or for his lack of one. He sat as judge himself in the only case of witchcraft ever tried in Pennsylvania, and the superstition died under his eye. He adopted a humane, reformatory system of prison management, which England did not reach for more than a hundred years afterwards. He abolished capital punishment for all crimes except murder and treason, and hanging even for these was practically unknown in the colony. He established a system of universal intellectual and industrial education. He kept his purpose that no soldier or emblem of war should, by his authority, be seen in the Commonwealth. Even his police, when there were any, he did not arm. He set up courts of law in the counties, but to prevent suits he also established in each of them

boards of arbitration. When misunderstandings and contentions arose in the Assembly, or in different parts of the Commonwealth, he allayed them by kindness, considerateness and patience. His letters from England were full of the same spirit, and were nearly as efficacious as his presence in person. In his last appeal from England, so great was the force of his letter to the colonists that not a single member of the old Assembly was returned at the new election. He bought the Indians' lands, made his famous treaty with them, and, without exception, treated them as brothers and friends, and his single power over them was literally greater than that of all the soldiers who ever crossed the Atlantic. It is certainly something akin to the highest kind of success, that for thirty-six years, as Proprietary, Governor and Statesman, the ideal of Christian leadership which he had set for himself he maintained without spot or wrinkle, in the face of so much that was harassing and discouraging.

In the second place, he succeeded in defending the liberties of his colony against the encroachments of English greed and tyranny, which more than once threatened to engulf them. He came to America to make it his permanent home, but he spent here only four out of his thirty-six remaining years. Going back after two years to defend the cause of religious toleration, he found himself compelled to defend himself and the possession of his charter against the machinations of his powerful enemies at the English Court. He stood in the breach alone, and

broke the force of all the shafts of misrepresentation that were hurled at him, by the simple power of his transparent, straightforward Christian manhood. His rights in the colony as Governor, which were for a short time taken from him, were speedily restored. A second time the storm broke forth in a new way. The rapid growth of the colonies and their development in free government awakened the envy and the fear of England, and a movement was set on foot to take up all the proprietary rights, and to place the colonies under the direct control of the Crown and a military government. This, Penn could not think of allowing in the case of his colony, and hastening back to England he threw all the weight of his influence in Parliament and at the Court against the scheme. As years went on, and the Colonial Assembly began to treat him with the basest ingratitude, and his failing fortunes made it necessary for him to obtain money from some source he finally became willing to sell his proprietary rights to the Crown, but on the express condition that his Frame of Government should be maintained, and the liberties and independence of the colony in no wise interfered with. This condition the Crown refused to accept, and the sale was never consummated. Others of the American Commonwealths were finally seized by the Crown, but Pennsylvania, through Penn's influence at Court (which lasted long after his death), remained under the form of government which he had given it until the Revolution severed forever its connection with the mother country. The con-

stitution which grew up under his hand is, in its most essential features, the constitution of your great State to-day, and more, perhaps, than any other political document lies at the basis of the Constitution of the United States.

The people, also, whom Penn drew to his territory were among the most liberty-loving of all Europe. No sooner was his Frame of Government published, and his broad, humane spirit known, than multitudes from England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, Holland, Germany, Sweden and elsewhere began to flock to the banks of the Delaware. The growth of the colony was extraordinary, and its chief characteristics were its high moral character, its good order, and its intense love of freedom. The people, because of their diverse origin and their early habits and customs, were often turbulent and sometimes selfish and hard to manage, but they almost without exception were at heart deeply devoted to the cause of civil and religious liberty, and it is no exaggeration to say that, on the whole, no other colony contributed so much to the development and final establishment of liberty and independence in this great country as that which was moulded by the spirit and the political measures of William Penn. It was fitting, then, that the Declaration of Independence and the building and signing of our National Constitution should have taken place on the very spot consecrated by him to the freedom and highest moral development of mankind.

Penn's Indian policy, which was only the more conspicuous part of his general peace policy, was marked by the greatest of all his successes. The treaty of Shackamaxon, called "the fairest page in American history," "the only treaty never sworn to, and never broken," differed from the treaty made by Carver, and from all other treaties with which the attempt has been made to compare it, not only in being altogether a peace treaty, but in being, in reality, not a treaty with one sachem or tribe only, but with the whole Indian race at that time and for all time. The Indians were disarmed even before the treaty was made. When Penn told them that it was not the custom of himself and of his followers to use weapons of war against their fellow-men, and that therefore they had come to the council unarmed, the Chief Taminent placed on his head a chaplet, into which was twisted a little horn, and at this signal all the Indian warriors laid down their weapons. It is a commonplace of our history that this treaty was not violated by the Indians until it was violated by the white men of the colony. For more than thirty years after Penn's death, so strongly did the Indians feel that all Pennsylvania must be in character like the founder, that they did not retaliate when wronged until trespass was heaped upon trespass, and no open rupture came until the peace party was outvoted in the General Assembly, and the colony armed herself for war. When she took the sword, the sword devoured her. The fury of war, with its horrible Indian massacres, swept

over her once peaceful soil, and her history lost its fine uniqueness and became stained on many pages with blood.

With the real followers of Penn, the great treaty never was broken by the Indians, because they themselves never broke it. No Quaker blood was shed in Pennsylvania during the years of cruel war which followed the arming of the colony. Francis Parkman has labored hard in his brilliant pages to show that this oft-made statement is not true. But the Boston historian, whose nature was essentially bellicose, and who came dangerously near to accepting the theory that "there is no good Indian but a dead Indian," seems not to have been able to distinguish between a true and a nominal Quaker. It is true that a few persons who abandoned their principles by arming themselves and taking sides with the war party, were slain, though they tried to protect themselves with the Quaker name; but they were no more Quakers than a black man is a white one.* The treaty was not only kept during those times, but it has been kept ever since, with

*Even if it could be shown that a few genuine Friends were slain during these or other wars, this would not prove as against the large number of cases of the opposite kind that the policy of peace is valueless from the standpoint of safety. No intelligent advocate of the policy has ever claimed that it would, if consistently maintained, secure absolute immunity from death by violence in all cases. Right and Christian duty, not safety, are the chief reasons urged in its support. And yet the many remarkable cases of preservation of Friends during the wars in Pennsylvania in the 18th century, in Ireland during the latter part of the same century and in the South during our civil war prove that peace principles faithfully maintained have a very high, if not complete, protective value.

the true followers of Penn. Quaker men and women have associated in all conceivable ways with the Red Men in all parts of the land, during the "century of dishonor" in our relations with them since the signing of the Constitution. They have established homes in their midst, have founded and maintained schools among them, have taught them the arts of industry and instructed them in Christianity; they have acted as government agents and inspectors, and have gone boldly among them when they were on the war-path, and when the war-dance was on, but no tomahawk has ever been lifted against one who was known to be a "Broadhat." The stars still shine and the rivers still run down to the sea, and Indian and Quaker alike, though standing in important respects over against each other at the opposite poles of civilization, have been true to the pledges made under the old elm tree.

As to the Commonwealth, the peace experiment was successful for seventy years, though a considerable part of the colony always opposed it and clamored for arms. Seventy years of peace in the turbulent atmosphere of that time meant much more than it would mean now, and is as near a demonstration as anything short of actual trial could be that the same thing might be done again by any State or nation whose people were convinced that it ought to be done and which had the courage to try it. The policy of peace never failed in Pennsylvania; Pennsylvania simply abandoned it. If it had been faithfully persisted in, that is, if governors and councils and as-

semblies and a sufficient majority of the people had continued to be, in spirit and in deed, like Penn and his first helpers, I for one have the faith, or, if you please to call it so, the credulity, to believe that Pennsylvania would have preserved her rights and liberties inviolate, that the French and Indian war would have missed her territory, that no Indian massacre would ever have polluted her soil, that the revolutionary war might through her influence have been avoided, or, at least, that Pennsylvania herself would have come through to complete and final independence, in union with the other colonies, without having shed any man's blood or having lost a drop of her own.

It was inevitable, as we see it now, that this peace policy in the government of the colony should sooner or later be abandoned. There were not people enough, unfortunately, who believed in it, to keep it up. Of the numbers who poured in from all parts of Europe only a few had any real understanding of or sympathy with the principles out of which it grew. This class came gradually to prevail among the population and in the halls of legislation. Even Penn's immediate successors in the governorship and proprietorship but feebly maintained his strength of conviction, his energy and his wisdom, and those farther removed were restless to throw overboard his peace policy long before the legislative body untied their hands. No policy could live under such conditions, for policies are little more than breath or paper unless

they have back of them men out of whose life they spring, or whose convictions make them essentially their own. But the failure of the policy to stand under the circumstances and its previous success for a period nearly two-thirds as long as our entire national life are both proofs of its superior excellence, and more particularly of the unsurpassed greatness and glory of the man who created it and almost alone maintained it against the world so long.

Though the policy was finally abandoned, the experiment with it has exercised and still continues to exercise a great and growing educational influence in our national life. While turning over the leaves of our history, the eyes of our school children have never missed the pages written by William Penn. Admiration for him, though often lying away unexpressed, has been as genuine and not unfrequently as great as that for the men who have fought for our liberties on the field of battle. The peace sentiment which has always been strong among our people, which has inspired some of the noblest utterances of men of the highest national fame,—Washington, Franklin, Grant, Sherman, Sumner, Garrison, Whittier, Longfellow, Lowell, and which is more and more shaping our foreign policies and dictating the solution of our industrial problems owes much to the vivid object lesson which he gave. This lesson has been silently but irresistibly shaping the ideal of the nation. Through its influence, standing there like a magnificent statue of light,

we have finally thrown overboard, I believe forever, the detestable Indian policy whose cruel inhumanity might well rank us among the most sordidly selfish and tyrannical peoples of history, a policy equaled in wickedness only by our former treatment of the black man, the movement for whose freedom likewise began on this selfsame spot under the influence of Penn. The influence of his object lesson, co-operating with other forces of course, has brought us up to the point where we are now rapidly establishing boards of arbitration and conciliation just like those which he set up in the primeval forests. It has done much toward making us a nation without arms and armies. It is making us the mediator among the contending nations of the earth. It is an unequivocal protest, which will some day be heard and heeded, against the present effort to militarize the youth of our land, through the schools and the churches, and against the stealthily growing but un-American ambition of a certain portion of our people that the United States should become the war-mistress of the seas.

The "holy experiment" will never again be made under anything like the conditions which existed at the close of the seventeenth century. It belonged to its own time and in the same form will never be repeated. It was, as it was doubtless God's purpose that it should be, not only a protest against the wickedness of the time but a divine indication of what government is everywhere to be when the Christ-spirit shall have subdued the world. It is not